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## VOX

Welcome to Issue 12.

Hopefully, this will now be the standard size of the magazine, so it's not being recorded as a double-issue as was the case with the last offering. The **Back Issues** department is looking rather depleted at the moment, but again, *hopefully* this will be rectified in the not too distant future.

The first **Fiction Issue** is nearly ready for publication, so if you would like to be sure of obtaining a copy, please send 50p or 2 International Response Coupons if you live outside the UK. Happy reading.

Chris Blackford / November 1992

12

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## CONTENTS

**Conspiracy / 4**

**Improview / 14**

**New Music from Russia / 20**

**Videophile / 27**

**Book reviews / 33**

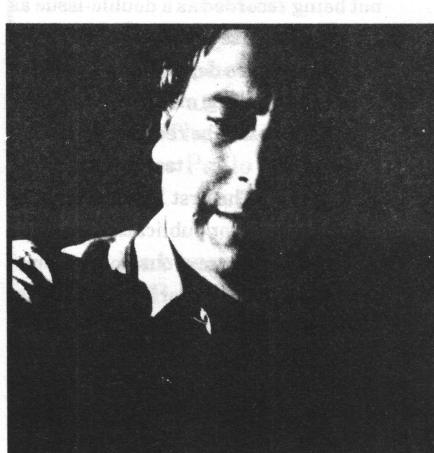
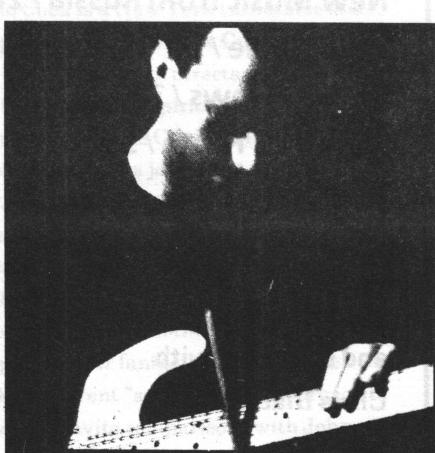
**Alfred 23 Harth / 36**

**Prime cuts / 49**

**editor / publisher / designed  
and struggled with**

**Chris Blackford**

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.



### ***conspiracy theories***

texts:

**Adam Bohman** prepared strings

**Nick Couldry** keyboards

**Andy Hammond** electric guitars

**John Telfer** baritone sax alto sax flute

**Conspiracy** began in May 1989 when Adam Bohman (b. 12/8/59) met Nick Couldry (b. 1/7/58) at an improvisation class run by Phil Wachsmann at London's City Literary Institute. Later, saxophonist Barry Edgar Pilcher and Andy Hammond (b. 22/6/58) joined. The group was chosen from 50 entries to play at the Society for the Promotion of New Music's Improvisation Day at the Donmar Warehouse in July 1989. **The Beaufort Scale** (1990) received critical acclaim, inviting favourable comparisons with the longstanding British improvising group AMM.

John Telfer (b. 11/1/63) replaced Pilcher in the Autumn of 1990 and the following year the group gigged intensively in London, including occasional collaborations with percussionists Eddie Prevost and Mark Sanders. They also developed an interest in mixed-media projects which involved performing in spaces not normally associated with music, such as museums and art galleries.

Summer 1992 saw the release of a second album, **Intravenous**, which more than fulfilled the promise of the first album. An Arts Council funded UK tour followed.

In the relatively short time they have been together, Conspiracy have emerged as a disciplined and cohesive force in British experimental music. They are now already widely regarded as among the finest improvisors of their generation.

## INTRODUCTION TO TEXTS

Group interviews tend to be, at best, fragmentary, rather disappointing affairs where not everybody contributes equally,

therefore leaving the overview to the more forthright member(s) of the group. With Conspiracy, I wanted to break the mould. This is a group working in an area (improvised music) where everybody has an equal responsibility in deciding the shape and direction the music should take; everybody has a distinctive voice, so I wanted everybody to have the opportunity to be heard. Moreover, I wanted to avoid the normal *pressure* of the interview-situation and to encourage the musicians to *prepare* their answers within certain areas specified by myself. The last section, dealing with performance, is a group statement. Finally, I have resisted the possible temptation to draw the individual strands together into an overall 'theory' of the group. The place for this sort of cohesion should be the music itself. (Chris Blackford)

## 1. ROADS TO FREEDOM

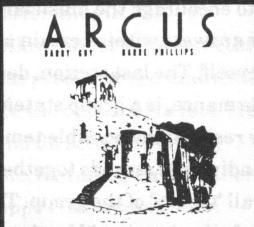
**Adam Bohman:** I suppose I first became aware of improvised/experimental music (or contemporary music in general) in about 1973. At that time I was listening to John Peel's late night radio shows. He was playing things like Henry Cow, Faust, Fred Frith (solo) and Ivor Cutler. This music had a profound effect on me because I had already begun constructing homemade instruments and sound sources. The early efforts that resulted from this were recorded on my father's reel to reel machine - sounds could be sped up, slowed down, played backwards etc. Also, 'Music In Our Time' on BBC Radio 3 had introduced me to contemporary composed music.

At school I'd taken up the cornet, so part of



**Maya**

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my time was spent on more orthodox musical activity. My exposure to the purely improvised music of Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, John Stevens etc came about two years later in 1975. By this time I was playing rock-based material with my brother and friends (round each other's houses - never any concerts).

In the early days we only had homemade instruments to play on, so I managed to fit into that okay. However, the *purely* experimental material remained a solo concern until I joined a workshop group at the Cockpit Theatre in 1981. Here, for the first time, I was playing with broadly like-minded individuals. With Nick Couldry, I formed a group from members of the Cockpit Theatre workshop which was one of the predecessors of the current Conspiracy. Nick and I formed Conspiracy itself in 1989.

**Nick Couldry:** My background was classical music - playing pieces from the Romantic piano repertoire and listening to a wide range of classical music, particularly 19th and 20th century. I had done a little composing since my teens but lack of training and time led me to give up.

I turned increasingly to improvising on the piano, but on my own and completely in private. I had absolutely no idea that anyone else improvised freely until I was introduced to Phil Wachsmann's class at the City Literary Institute in 1985. It was a revelation to me; the opportunity to explore collective means of expression without any score.

Around the same time I played some Javanese gamelan music which reinforced my interest in collective music making, but I quickly decided that so-called 'free improvisation' offered the most personal

means of exploring my feelings towards music. Adam Bohman and I met at this time and played in various groups. We were held back by our isolation: there was no organisation in London, then, which brought musicians together.

Since then, playing improvised music has grown in importance to me, until now I realise that it has changed the direction of my life in ways that go far beyond music itself.

**Andy Hammond:** In many ways I had stiff opposition to me learning electric guitar while still living with my family. At about 14 years old I had to smuggle a friend's acoustic guitar into the house, or else my dad would never have allowed it. At 16 I made my own pick-ups and put them in a gutted electric guitar, and at 18, I went to work and with my first pay packet bought a cheap electric; with the second, a cheap amp. Up until then my listening was mainly 'punk' (Magazine, Siouxsie & the Banshees, Joy Division) and Led Zeppelin (the heavier stuff).

Then there was a big gap. I had no way of breaking out of my limits and what I did was less and less satisfying. Then I came across Fred Frith's *Guitars On The Table* and *Iskra 1903* (Derek Bailey, Paul Rutherford and Barry Guy). This was when the flood-gates opened. It was my way into playing complicated sound-based stuff while having had no musical training at all, *and it felt right*.

In the next two years I formed Yo! Seagull which played at Derek Bailey's 'Oasis' gigs and still continues as a sound-processing, recording outfit, and Art Attack, a mixed-media event at Gillingham Adult Education Centre Open Day - we got thrown out for being too radical!

**John Telfer:** I've never really seriously considered doing anything else but playing music. My most powerful memories are invariably musical, whether singing in cathedrals when I was young, playing classical flute in orchestras, or more recently sitting in with Sun Ra's Arkestra. My progression from classical music, through to jazz to free improvisation has less to do with the music itself - I still listen to a wide variety of styles - but it's more about the atmosphere and attitudes which prevail when actually playing the music. I've always felt uncomfortable in over serious situations where there is pressure to conform to someone else's idea of what is musically 'correct'. I'm not interested in putting music on a pedestal above life. I enjoy the challenge of each moment playing, and if I don't play what I intended I see my 'mistake' as a friend to welcome, a different situation to adapt to.

## 2. INFLUENCES, INSPIRATION

**Adam Bohman:** With prepared strings and objects, I tend to favour the amplified acoustic sounds with no external electronic effects. Even when I do employ electronics (in the recording of sound textures for tape pieces using the pause switch, for instance) these tend to be rather primitive, i.e. faulty leads, variable speed, distortion etc - all very much to do with the recording process itself.

Therefore, people who have worked in this general area like John Cage (**Cartridge Music, Variations II**), Paul Lytton, Hugh Davies, Parmegiani etc are all very inspiring. Obviously, it's the general atmosphere conveyed by the music rather than any specific details that's important, i.e. I don't consciously take things from one source or

another.

Playing with Conspiracy is a challenge because I have to try and integrate my sounds with those of more orthodox instruments (even if those instruments are being played in unorthodox ways). It seems to me that there are very few groups actually attempting this; and that, for me, is one of the enjoyable and challenging aspects of Conspiracy music.

**Nick Couldry:** For a long time, my musical influences were almost exclusively from western classical music. I was completely unaware of the improvised field and even in recent years I haven't generally been influenced by other improvisors, I think, although the London scene has been an encouragement.

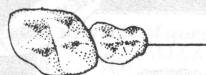
I've always been interested in complex effects, how to make musical sense out of a lot of disparate elements. The musicians who have influenced me most are probably those who have succeeded in this. In the classical field, the symphonies of Mahler, Ives and Tippett and Beethoven's late works, for instance, and also the large-scale works of Stockhausen and Xenakis; the soundscapes of AMM; some of Fred Frith's work (e.g. **The Technology of Tears**) and the work of Public Enemy.

Among pianists, I feel closest musically to the US pianist Borah Bergman, who deserves to be better known than he is over here. He has experimented with developing the tension between the hands with left and right playing completely different material, and using melodic fragments as part of a more general disorder. At the same time, my ideas about how far you can go in bringing in sounds from 'everyday life' have been enormously influenced by working with

Adam Bohman over the past seven years. When I first heard him, he seemed beyond the pale. Gradually, I've come to hear his sound from the inside. Finally, there are some performers who have been a tremendous inspiration. I'm thinking particularly of Cecil Taylor, Diamanda Galas and Keith Tippett. Experiencing the intensity of their performances inspires me to keep going.

**Andy Hammond:** To all intents and purposes, my early influences were punk (Siouxsie, Magazine, Gang of Four, Joy Division) and Led Zeppelin. These were very much while I was 'learning' the guitar. As influences they have in the main disappeared, the exception being the heavier and more interesting elements of Led Zeppelin. Increasingly, I try to listen to as many types of music as possible, anything really good in any field of music, though I actively dislike Country & Western and opera leaves me cold. My main staples are fringe rock (Fred Frith, Thrash/Speed Metal-Bastro, Silverfish, Napalm Death), Hip Hop (especially Public Enemy) and 20th century classical (Stockhausen up to 1972, Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Xenakis etc), especially anything heavily textural with violins and cellos.

**John Telfer:** It was only when I started playing jazz saxophone at college that I thought about an individual approach to playing. Before that, playing classical flute, it was more a question of following a well trodden technical path. John Surman was a huge influence then - the sheer range of acoustic possibilities and emotional intensity that he could summon from a baritone more than made up for the drag of carting the



Carnassial

coffin-like case around to gigs. hearing Evan Parker and Steve Lacy for the first time was an equally inspirational experience - and the soprano case was a good deal lighter! It's not so much the technical facility which attracts me to certain players, but more the spirit in which they approach music-making. The warm-hearted lurch of an Arkestra Walt Disney cover or the happiness in a single stab from Maceo Parker mean more to me than any over-competent pyrotechnician straining to impress.

### 3. INSTRUMENTS: PREFERRED APPROACHES

**Adam Bohman:** I use a cheap chinese violin adapted to suit my own purposes. It has two metal strings and a glass homemade bridge. Also, a three-string balalaika and various objects are employed, either in conjunction with the strings or as sound sources in their own right. All the stringed instruments are prepared and played flat on a table surface, being amplified by one or more contact mikes.

The objects include pieces of wood, glass, plastic tile and metal, tins, hacksaw blades, knitting needles, toys, pieces of cork, polystyrene etc etc. Some items are blu-tacked to the table (i.e. pieces of tile can be played with wire brushes to produce continuous mushing sounds, and pieces of glass can produce rasping sounds when played with a hacksaw blade. As previously mentioned, I very rarely use electronic effects, preferring untreated amplified acoustic sounds.



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# October Music

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Polar bear



Sloth bear

**Nick Couldry:** For me, the first principle is physical immediacy: feeling close to my instrument and communicating that to the audience. A slightly odd thing to say for a keyboard player. Many have written off the piano because of its artificiality, although I'm sure that's wrong.

I'm often forced to play an electric keyboard for practical reasons. Even then, I always try to have moment-to-moment control over volume levels and any distortion I'm using. Also, because I know that synthesized sounds can get dull if overused, I simplify what I do and often concentrate on providing a background to what the other musicians in Conspiracy are doing. I'm hoping later this year to work more with samplers and expand the range of what I do within Conspiracy.

My work on acoustic piano is more personal and works better, I think, in a solo setting (e.g. the 1990 recording, *Sieve*). I often work directly on the strings with metal, glass, wood, tin or cloth; I'm trying all the time to generate new voices within the piano and explore areas as far away as possible from the standard piano mechanism.

At the same time you can't ignore the piano's history or its melodic power. I want to find ways of bringing together, into *one* voice, the less conventional ways of playing. That

sometimes means quoting a familiar melody in the middle of an unusual texture. Maggie Nicols summed it up beautifully when she talked about "integrating everything that you love". In the long run, this music's strength is not in *excluding*, but finding increasingly stimulating ways of *including*: and that means everything that affects you from Madonna to Xenakis to the sounds of a tube train. That is what Conspiracy is about and my solo work is a more personal application of that.

**Andy Hammond:** Basically, my approach to guitar could be summed up as a rock feel/attack linked to a dissonance reminiscent of 20th century classical music. I have a very *physical* approach to the instrument. Most guitarists pluck strings, whereas I tend to fight them, *pushing* the pick through them and down into other strings even if I'm not playing them. There are very few 'clean notes'. I try to put my whole body into playing (often at the expense of 'good technique'!).

If I'm playing in a key, then I'm usually not aware of it, in fact, I try to avoid it. Every note is relative. I'm interested in how one sound/note is followed by another. Increasingly, I'm interested in using sudden transitions from soft to loud, slow to fast, simple to complex etc., in a way that breaks things up without being clumsy or destructive, a bit like having a prominent landmark suddenly appear round a corner of a road you're travelling on.

Most 'rock' guitarists play by stringing interesting strong phrases together with 'bridges' of notes which are not so interesting. I can't be bothered unless it's strong all the way through. I'd rather leave gaps. I've had

no formal training/tuition, just bits and pieces out of books. Most of what I use with Conspiracy I've invented/re-invented in my own practice.

**John Telfer:** For all the technical refinements in keywork and tuning of the modern saxophone, on the most basic level I'm blowing down a long conical metal tube, manipulating the sonic potential of different air columns. While I don't deliberately avoid playing tonally - after all that's what the instrument was designed to do - nevertheless, the physical nature of sound production in keyed wind instruments is so complex and subtly variable that it opens up many different approaches to pursue. One of the few joys of teaching beginners the saxophone is hearing the wealth of bizarre sounds they can produce. Improvising on the saxophone is all too often seen as a licence to overwhelm the opposition, which seems a shame when there are so many timbres available. Playing with Conspiracy certainly gives me the opportunity to explore this broader spectrum. Obviously, every instrument has its acoustic limitations, but my baritone still gives me that thrill of the unexpected.

#### 4. PERFORMANCE: CONTEXTS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

This music is not about displaying a technique or giving people a recognisable package. It's about expanding the range of sound which can make sense as music, and communicating that to an audience live. So, it would be pretty arbitrary to pretend that when people come to hear us they should ignore the *visual* surroundings in which

we play or that we shouldn't be involved in changing those surroundings as well as just playing music.

An interesting visual context can inspire people to listen to the music more closely; seeing how a sound is produced can make you listen to it differently, can give you a way in to the sound world we work in.

We're working now with the painter Stephen Nicholas on developing a visual environment for performances which can be adapted to specific situations. At a recent performance in London he created friezes of painted x-rays which divided up the space we played in.

This visual side to our performance is not an accompaniment, it's part of an overall performance. That's why when we asked Gina Southgate to paint us during a live performance (she's painted many musicians live), we miked up the surface she worked on so that the sounds of her brush joined up with our sound.

Adam Bohman and Nick Couldry have also recently worked with the sculptor Chris Dorsett and with Max Eastley in an exhibition at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum, known for its extraordinary collection of skulls, masks and other objects. This music was effectively part of a general transformation of the traditional museum space.

We now want to extend that to other spaces not normally associated with music, such as disused office spaces and supermarkets. Organising it will take time, but we believe it's an important part of our work. We also intend to collaborate with dancers as well as artists. We are working against people's conventional sense of how sound fits into their lives. **R**

## RECORDINGS

### CONSPIRACY

**The Beaufort Scale** (cass 1990)  
**Intravenous** (CD & cass 1992)

### JOHN TELFER & ADAM BRETT

**Blag** (CD 1991)  
(cass 1992)

### ADAM BOHMAN & CROW-

### DIASTOLIC MURMURS

### Live Electronics

### Dissections 4 / Hyperaesthesia

### Purgations

### Nervenkrankheiten

(all cassettes)

### NICK COULDREY

**Mouths of Pearl** (cass 1990)  
**Sieve** (cass 1991)

### ADAM BOHMAN, NICK COULDREY

### & MAX EASTLEY

Recording at Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford  
(CD forthcoming)

The members of Conspiracy founded the **Polar Bear Club** in London which is concerned to promote live improvised and experimental musics.

# CONSPIRACY

*"All the players are brilliant" City Limits*

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London Musicians' Collective News

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# Improvie

## A Response to Nick Couldry's Improvie (Rubberneck 10/11)

As an improvising musician who decided some years ago that I didn't like the term 'experimental music' to describe what I do, I must take issue with your view that 'improvised music' is a redundant term. 'Experimental' refers to something 'not yet proved or tested'; experiments are what we do before we get to the real thing. The implication is that one day I'll get my act together and stop playing improvised music. It's the kind of view that benign members of the classical music community have when they dabble with improvised music - that it might be a good testing ground for ideas and techniques that they can then carry back to enrich proper music.

For me improvised music is the stuff, with its own recent history and tradition. Indeed, I play composed music to improve my chops for playing improvised music. It's not that I dislike composed music, I have a fairly open minded approach to music: it's just that it's not where my passion lies as a player.

What, after all, is absurd about the term

'improvisor'? It is descriptive; it lets the listener know that they are witnessing a musical journey in real-time.

Gus Garside

## NATIONAL MUSIC DAY

*"It'll be a day for everyone. After all, music is something that touches most people's lives."*

Mick Jagger

*"I think National Music Day is a rather silly idea."* Elton John

So what did you do on National Music Day (NMD) way back in the summer sunshine of June? Maybe got up late, fed the papers, read the children, dug the cat, watered the dog, took the garden for a walk. Listened to the Archers, went to church, went out somewhere to enjoy the wonderful weather. Maybe even hummed a little tune, tried out that Silverfish CD, plunked on the piano (or the couch . . .).

Our two most usual routes to music are radio and records, and it is these that make the Stars shine. So I turned on National Music Day, and learned that they were due to shine out of Wembley (Elton John and Eric Clapton), Bath (Jose Carreras, the smallest of the big tenors), and various parts of Mick Jagger - sorry, Mick Jagger in various places. Lots of people were supposed to go to Clapham Common (how many did?), and none to the Albert Hall. Wise man the promoter who cancelled there . . .

(I also heard, halfway through my muesli, that four million people were having sex at that moment - not all in one place, and I couldn't hear any of them - not even my noisy neighbours. Anyway, NMD called).

Subliminal message no.1: NMD was

basically a showcase for big names and mainstream music. (Incidentally, what happened to the ticket money? I mean I don't mind if it went towards Rollers and Rolexes, but maybe it was going to a cause I'd actually like to support.) Direct message no.1: government money - our money - was spent on this, so can we have some feedback please (no, not you Mr Sound Engineer).

The thinking behind NMD seems to have been a little wonky, and the publicity decidedly DIY. Big-name concerts are packed any time; concert halls have audiences most Sundays of the year; Glastonbury was in the diary long before NMD tumbled from Tim Renton/David Mellor's departmental womb (delivered by midwives Harvey Goldsmith and old MJ - where was the exposure for the *next* Mick Jagger - surely it's time for the one *after* next.) Subliminal message no.2: if you haven't made it yet (nothing to do with Radio 4 at muesli-time), NMD ain't there to help you. But what did you do? What did you do?

Rumour had it that some 1500 events were organised for NMD (or coincided with it), and the nationwide excitement and involvement may simply have passed me by. I guess there really were lots of single-cell events around (how many more than one other Sundays in June?), but no sense of collective music-making and -taking, no greater NMD monster evolving from the national music slime.

It wasn't possible to get a good view of what all these events were, to decide 'I've got to do this, I've got to hear that'. NMD listings were non-existent, and there was certainly no incentive to sample musics beyond your usual experience - Radio 2's coverage was inevitably going to be retro rather than progro. Subliminal message nos. 3 & 4: you

were there for NMD, not NMD for you; Music = wrinkly pop. Direct message no. 2: I know it's too late now, but what *was* going on out there (apart from Prince 'it was no more than a coincidence' in Glasgow) beyond Watford-comes-to-Wembley?

Subliminal questions nos. 1 & 2: what is National? What was the thinking behind Day? Some of us sing, some of us dance, some do a bit of most things (never mind the muesli), others do bugger all but like a nice tune. Byrd to Bird, acciacatura to xylophone (and the rest), come on, come ON! How about a National Music Week. Memo to Mr Mellor (or on past form, his successor).

Alistair Bamford

## JE SANS FRONTIERES

**This** is the beginning of a directory of relevant magazines which I hope to add to as I am made aware of more titles. I should add that all overseas titles are published in their native tongue, so it's down to the local Tech College to enroll for some evening classes . . .

**inVOX** is based in Eastern European Estonia. I have issue 6 which is devoted to a music festival headlined by REM. I'm told that other issues offer a more exclusively experimental diet, however this issue does include a report on Peter Brotzmann and a CD review of Henry Kaiser. The magazine's English speaking/writing contact is Tiit Kusnets. (*inVOX, P.O. Box 601, EE0026 Tallinn, Estonia*).

**Jazz the Magazine** (formerly **Jazz FM**) has now severed its links with the Jazz FM radio station. It's a well produced monthly dealing with all varieties of jazz, from the early pioneers to the latest pioneers. Recent



# Variant

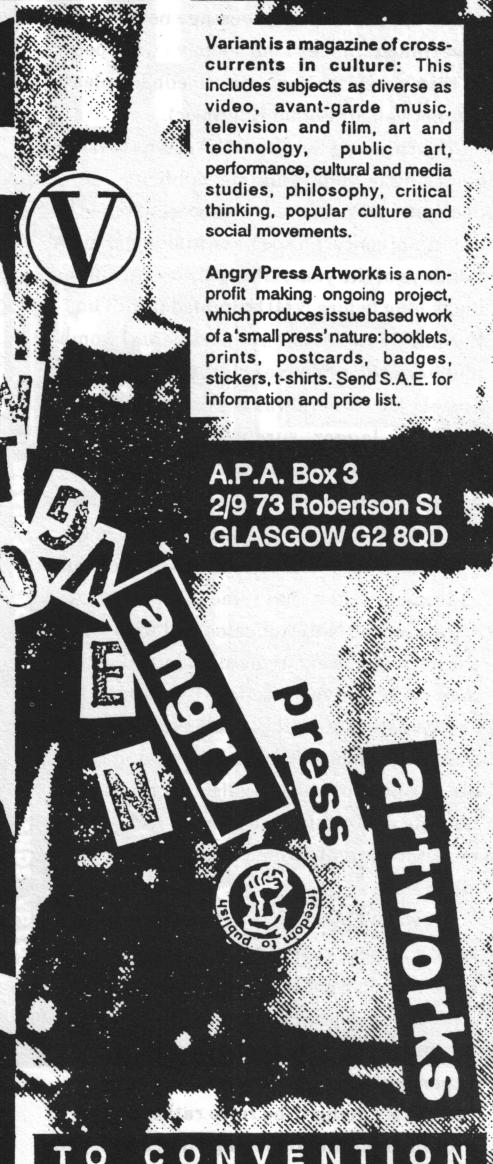
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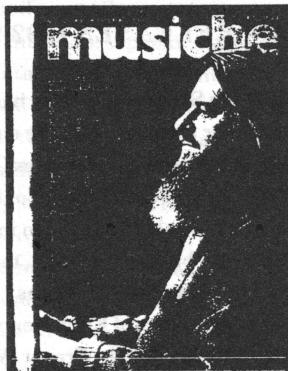
A CHALLENGE TO CONVENTION



issues have included interviews with Artie Shaw, Ornette Coleman, Pat Metheny. Book reviews, listings and a good range of CD reviews. Informed writing. (editor: *Tony Russell, Jazz the Magazine, Observer Publications Ltd, Chelsea Bridge House, Queenstown Road, London SW8 4NN, UK*).

**JazzPodium** is a major player in Germany and well established, too. I have heard it described as 'mainstream' but the June '92 issue contained articles/reviews on Schlippenbach, Ganelin, Eberhard Weber, Peter Kowald and Heiner Goebbels. Mainstream? Sounds very appealing to me! (*JazzPodium, Vogelsangstrasse 32, 7000 Stuttgart 1, Germany*).

**Jazzthetik** is the other big name in Germany, though I've yet to lay hands on a copy. They've been generous in their comments about *Rubberneck*, so I'm told, so they must be wonderful people. (*Jazzthetik, Emdenerstr 10, 4400 Munster, Germany*).



**Musiche** is a very enjoyable magazine from Italy. The last issue, no. 12, contained an interview with Diamanda Galas, profiles of Frank Zappa, Fluxus, Robert Wyatt, Michel Faubert, Magma, Cassiber and Kalahari Surfers. The profiles are well

researched with useful footnote references. Also, festival news, CD reviews and a crossword! Nicely presented. (editor: *Riccardo Pioli, Musiche, piazza Brin 13, 19122 La Spezia, Italy*).

**Music From The Empty Quarter** has quickly established itself as one of the leading voices in the industrial/noise and related fields area. The names of some of these groups scare the shit out of me and I hope there's not some hideous form of misogyny lurking behind some of them. Interviews in recent issues with Coil, Karl Blake, Can etc. CD reviews are on the short and snappy side. Clear presentation. (editor: *Deadhead, The Empty Quarter, P.O. Box 87, Ilford, Essex IG1 3HJ, UK*).

**Notes** is an interestingly eclectic read from France, covering a range of experimental musics and progressive rock. Few other magazines have the courage to associate themselves with the latter, but **Notes** have an eye for the more interesting aspects of this genre. Interviews in recent issues with Art Zoyd, Keith Rowe, Cyrille Verdeaux, Daevid Allen etc. Good range of CD reviews and independent labels information. (editor: *Jean Christoph Alluin, Notes, 16 rue Hignard, 44000 Nantes, France*).

**Ostinato** appears to be one of a kind, at least in England, anyway. It's primarily a magazine of jazz related poetry and also includes a conversational review section dealing with free jazz in particular. Not afraid to wear its heart on its sleeve in this respect. The poetry is engaging, intelligent, passionate about the music it describes. Issue 3 contains an interview with Allen Ginsberg. (editor: *Stephen C. Middleton, Ostinato, P.O. Box 522, London N8 7SZ, England*).

**Revue & Corrige** is a well produced magazine from France concerning itself with a variety of experimental musics, labels and experimental cinema. Issue 12 (*printemps 92*) contained interviews with Jim O'Rourke, John Greaves, Hexameron etc, and an article on Gavin Bryars. Jurgen Reble is the experimental film-maker in this issue. CD reviews etc. (editor: *Jerome Noetinger, 25 rue Docteur Bordier, 38100 Grenoble, France*).

**Variant**, based in Glasgow, is a cross-genre quarterly. Articles, interviews, reviews on non-mainstream visual arts, literature, media issues and musics. The latter has been more evident in recent issues (Keith Rowe, Derek Bailey). There's an intelligent political undercurrent running through the magazine which is not in the least sloganising. Well written and well presented. (editor: *Malcolm Dickson, 73 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8QD, Scotland*).

**The Wire** has now passed its 100th issue and new editor Mark Sinker has widened the magazine's scope. Experimental musics now jostle for pole position with the likes of rappers, dance groups, even Frank Sinatra. The readership is divided because their beloved magazine is evolving - and it's time they faced up to that. No magazine should exist *just* to please readers and, of course, there is no earthly reason why readers should continue to buy a magazine that no longer represents their interests. Provocatively written and well presented. (editor: *Mark Sinker, The Wire, 45 - 46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, UK*).

If your magazine deals with non-mainstream arts/media/cultural activity and you would like it mentioned in **Rubberneck** please send it to the following address:  
*21 Denham Drive, Basingstoke, Hampshire,*

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**Chris Blackford**

## BUBBLE & SQUEEK

**The Bubble & Squeek Club** is an excellent recent venture based in Reading, Berkshire (England) and promotes jazz, improvised and experimental musics. This is the end of their Autumn 1992 programme:

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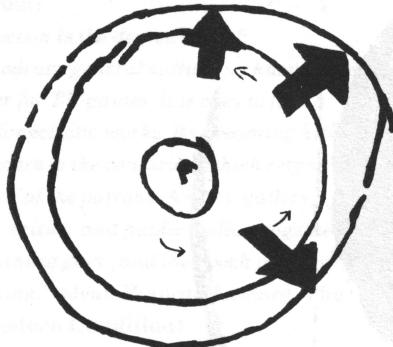
*Doors open 8.00pm; all performances start at 8.30pm.* The Bubble & Squeek Club is based at: Rising Sun Institute, 30 Silver Street, Reading. Tel: Reading 866788

## SLAM RELEASES 1992-93

The enterprising Slam Productions have three CDs due for release before the end of 1992. **A Big Honk** (CD 202) features George Ricci and the Improverts with Lol Coxhill. Romantic ensemble playing with an improv twist. Suitable for ballroom gliding, too! This to be followed by **The Vortex Tapes** (CD203), live recordings of Elton Dean with Keith Tippett, Louis Moholo, Trevor Watts and others, and **Exploded on Impact** (CD204) by the John Law Quartet. 1993 will see **George Haslam - Level Two** (CD303) which is George's quintet with Rutherford, Riley, Marsh and Mattos. Followed by an as yet untitled **Arc** (CD205) recording. Contact Slam Productions (0235) 529012. **R**

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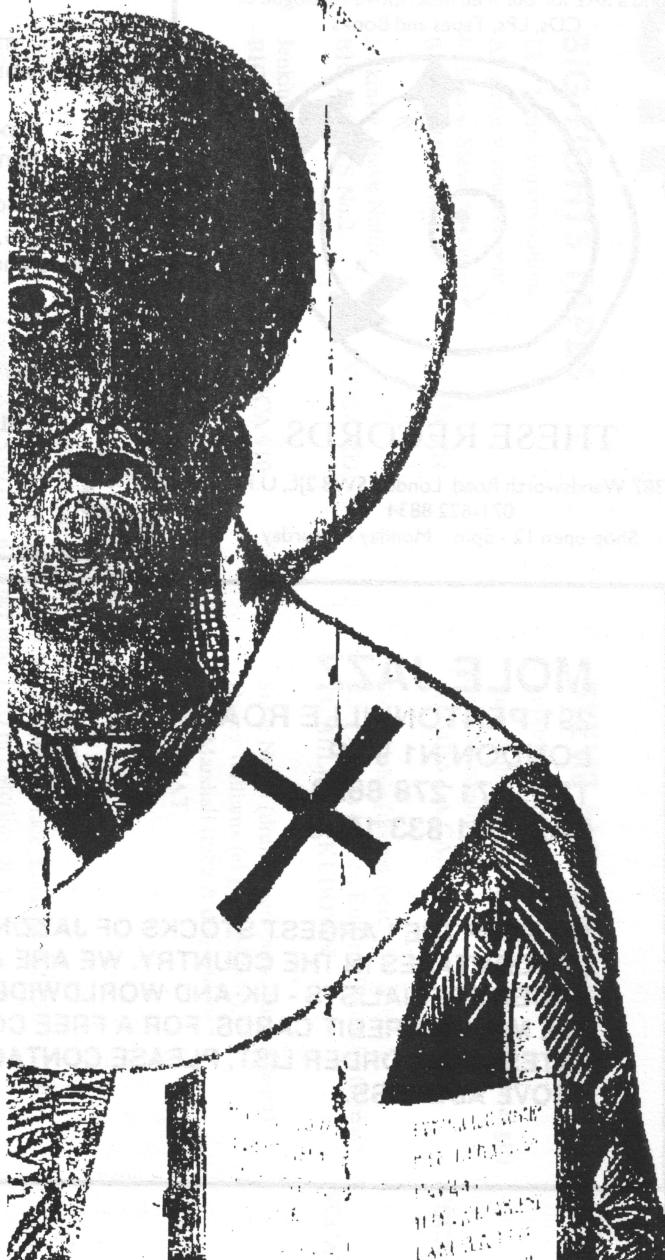


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**Chris Blackford**  
reviews  
**DOCUMENT**  
Leo Records



**Document: New Music From Russia -****The 80s**

Leo Records

CD LR 801 - 808

**DOCUMENT** is a monumental 8-CD set of approximately 10 hours of innovative music recorded during the 80s. Released in 1989, the set makes no claims to being definitive or comprehensive; its instigator, **Leo Feigin**, simply says: "...at best it should give some idea of the depth and breadth of the Soviet music scene." A modest claim indeed for what was one of the most important releases of the decade, and an unprecedented overview of some of the key figures working in experimental music in the Soviet Union.

**DOCUMENT**, however, is not a set of albums; it is a historical resource, an audio library supplemented by informative notes which give the listener an insight into developments and approaches from this vast, culturally diverse region. And, by 'culturally diverse', I mean an area steeped in Buddhistic, Christian, Islamic and Judaic traditions. Consequently the music of

**DOCUMENT** is polystylistic and multi-cultural. Finally, the set is a humanitarian statement, a testimony to the courage and perseverance of musicians and promoters who, over the decades, have continued to produce challenging, non-conformist music in an atmosphere of political repression. In fact, the tapes for **DOCUMENT** were smuggled out of the USSR.

**Dearly Departed**'s treatment of seven Russian folk songs is dedicated to the memory of "missing friends", one of whom is **Vladimir Arbuzov** who sings and plays bass and percussion on these recordings. Most West European listeners will find their

folk vocal harmonies unusual, particularly on the opening *a cappella*, 'There on a hill', where the five voices adopt a flattened, resonant approach to pitch. The instrumental passages merge folk material with jazz rhythm and improv exploration. This is a moving and poignant recording, and Irina Bogdanova's elegiac vocal on 'Isn't it a green oak that's catching fire?' is unforgettable.

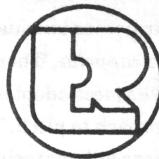
**Russian raga**

Merging of a different kind takes place on the **Vyacheslav Guyvoronsky / Vladimir Volkov** duo recording where jazz meets Indian raga to give "Russian raga". Volkov's double bass functions as a sort of tanpura drone and, in the up tempo phases, a textured tabla. Guyvoronsky's trumpet proceeds in stately fashion, occasionally spiralling aerobatically with flashes of Dixie and bop. A most engaging set where raga is used as a structural basis for the duo's flights of fantasy.

**spiritual**

'Ocean' is **Valentina Goncharova**'s spiritual concept-piece which attempts to express the fundamental forces of the universe through multi-tracked improvised music. She uses electric violins, a cello, drums, block-flute and her own voice to produce rhythmically vibrant music demanding the listener's attention on a number of shifting, interactive levels. This is not new age, ambient, ritual / trance or any other Western niche in the market. Meditative it is, but not surrounded by a pastel haze.

**Valentina Ponomareva** is a gypsy singer who has sung jazz and classical romances.



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Here she is heard with the Mark Pekarsky Percussion Ensemble demonstrating her ability as an improvising vocalist. In both pieces the Ensemble sets up expansive, spectral backdrops from which her voice emerges in all its breathy, loquacious, sensuous and sinister magnificence. Sofia Gubaidulina scores the percussion parts for the second piece and also performs with Ponomareva, Pekarsky and Victor Suslin on Leo's recent and excellent *Astreja - Music from Davos* (CD LR 181).

## wonderful rapport

Despite their name, **Jazz Group Archangelsk** are not only a jazz group. They favour long, structured improvisations which evolve through a number of sections, showcasing imaginative combinations of instruments. The group members are all multi-instrumentalists and have a wonderful rapport based on 20 years of regular collaboration. Highly eclectic, they fuse a variety of jazz idioms with Russian folk material and, to this reviewer, are at their best when venturing into the abstract. More of this direction can be heard on the recent **Portrait** (CD LR 180) which is further evidence that JGA are among the finest improvisors inside and outside Russia.

A mainstream jazz singer who is also dedicated to Russian folk music but by her own admission is "not a fan of the avant-garde", seems a strange choice for a box-set devoted to new music. **Datevik**

**Hovhannessian** has a fine voice if you like mainstream jazz and the romantically inclined big-band arrangements within Petrosian's 'Concerto for Voice'. This, however, is not the ideal context for either

and this space in the collection might have been better allocated to someone genuinely pursuing new form.

## "filth, misery and irony"

**Orkestrion** live in Volgograd in an industrial area Sergey Karsaev, the group's poet, describes as a "huge ghetto... with absolutely no cultural life at all." Strangely, the group members are "pathologically attached" to the "filth, misery and irony" of their surroundings. They also detest them. Sentiments this potent produce distinctive abstract music of a similarly ambiguous character: inconsolably bleak, remarkably serene, but usually a curious mixture of the two. This they achieve with objects picked up from factory tips and kitchens, combining these with conventional instruments. They improvise within "general ideas", the music unfolding with a quiet, sharply focussed intensity. Superb!

At his best the Lithuanian saxophonist, **Petras Vysniauskas**, has a clarity of tone reminiscent of Jan Garbarek. Here he is accompanied by **Kestutis Lusas'** versatile electronic keyboard which creates a variety of percussive and string environments in which the reedsman is able to demonstrate his virtuosity. Unfortunately, 'In Memoriam' seldom seems to rise above this virtuosity, opting for broad, dramatic gestures and idiomatic allusions at the expense of thematic direction.

## two masters

No direction lacking in **Anatoly Vapiro** and **Sergey Kuryokhin**'s duets recorded live in Tallin in 1981. Vapiro is Leningrad



(Sergey Kuryokhin)

Conservatoire trained, where he has also been a professor. 'Thracian Duos' draws on his knowledge of Bulgarian traditional music (his wife and grandfather are Bulgarian) and this he infuses with a jazz saxophonist's passion and intensity. Ample room is allowed for Kuryokhin's adventurous eclecticism. At times his piano is subjected to Cecil Taylor-like percussive attacks; on other occasions he provides the harmonic counterpoint to Vapiro's exquisitely majestic phrasing. Two subsequent miniatures nod and wink at

Benny Goodman and then Duke Ellington, displaying a delightful line in affectionate idiomatic parody of which these two musicians are undoubtedly masters.

### a distant future

Sainkho Namchylak's Buddhist influenced, Siberian "throat singing" was one of the highlights at the LMC's First Annual Festival of Experimental Music this year in London. This unusual and captivating overtone technique is well suited to improvised music, and here she joins the multi-instrumentalists of TRI-O for what is arguably the strangest and most exciting 20 minutes of the DOCUMENT set. This is decidedly non-western music, ancient and uncompromisingly modern. Ancestral voices speak to us from a distant future ...

### mockery and resentment

'Exercise' starts with the word FEAR, shouted in Russian by all three musicians: **Vladimir Chekasin, Sergey Kuryokhin and Boris Grebenshikov**. In 1983 it was sufficient to cause Leo Feigin to "chicken out" for fear of political reprisals against the musicians and release another version of Chekasin's composition without this declamation. Where another reviewer found this music "comic", to me it seems most tense and unnerving. Guitars rattle and unwind in the dark. Chekasin's alto manages an uplifting passage and then dissipates. Kuryokhin beats out a manic dance-like rhythm on piano; eventually it becomes a sort of deranged march reciprocated by the alto. Mockery and resentment, perhaps, but nothing much to laugh about here.

In contrast, **Homo Liber** sound lyrical. Unlike most improvisors in the **DOCUMENT** set, this duo of Vladimir Tolkachev and Yuri Yukechев prefers to improvise without pre-planned structures, yet, their music sounds almost as structured as most bop influenced notated compositions. These live recordings are generally tonal and quite sensuous in mood, though some strident repetitive synthesizer sequences are more provocative.

This disc closes with a stimulating collaboration of poetry and saxophony by **Yuri Dronov** and **Alexander Sakurov**. The latter blows up a bluesy gale against a backing tape of urban atmospherics, and is later joined by Dronov's doleful voice reading his rather pessimistic poem 'Blues'. Moments of funky synth pull the piece in other directions, too.

### a major figure

**Sergey Kuryokhin** is a major figure in Russian new music. His anarcho-theatrical, experimental music group, **Popular Mechanics**, enjoyed critical acclaim in the Western press, and as a highly imaginative and entertainingly eclectic piano soloist, he has delighted many audiences in Europe and America. These recordings of his trio made in 1980 demonstrate his virtuosity at the keyboard and, in particular, his rolling percussive style which is the focus of the second piece. The recent **Some Combinations of Fingers and Passion** (CD LR 179) is a fine example of this influential performer / composer's huge and often humorous scope.

The **Moscow Improvising Trio** has an appealingly relaxed feel to their work. There

is a deft and spacious use of individual drums and assorted percussion which often sets the tempo for Igor Grigoriev's angular splicing of blues, rock and abstract guitarwork.

Solovyev's haunting use of bamboo flute adds an ethnic flavour to their improvisations.

### darkly absorbing

'Incomplete tendencies of meta-reality' sounds like an early 70s Tangerine Dream title. In fact, it's a particularly lugubrious abstract improvisation by the **Makarov New Improvised Music Trio**. Percussion snaps and rumbles irascibly; there are patches of icy electric guitar and Vladislav Makarov's sinewy cello exerts a strong influence over the development of this half-hour piece. Quite how the title relates to the musical goings-on is hard to fathom, still, this is darkly absorbing music played with real conviction.

### The Ganelin Trio

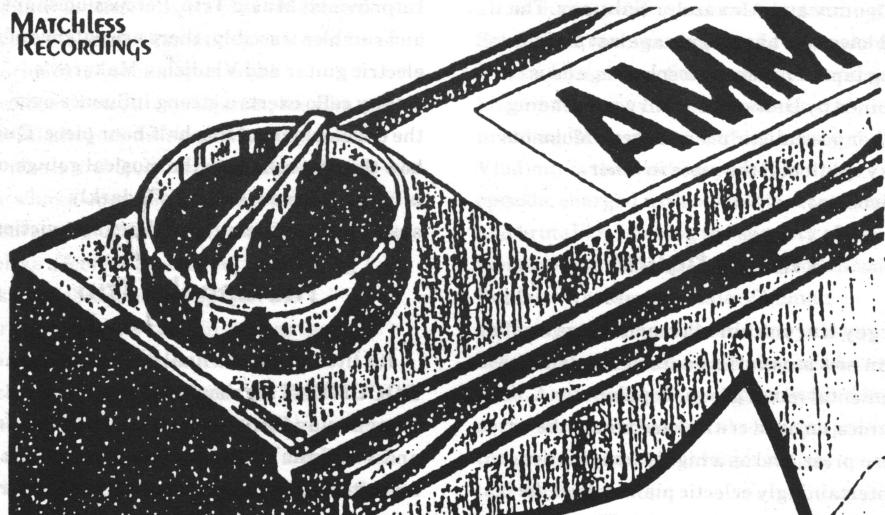
It's fitting that the final disc in the **DOCUMENT** set should be devoted to **Vyacheslav Ganelin**, **Vladimir Chekasin** and **Vladimir Tarasov** who each play solo and afterwards together as the **Ganelin Trio**. **Alexander Kahn**'s notes about the trio verge on the reverential, and for good reason, since they achieved legendary status in Russia and "emerged from the wilderness of Soviet jazz" of the 1960s to gain the widespread respect and acclaim of European and American jazz and new music audiences.

**Chekasin**'s saxophone solo is a flowing *tour de force*, eventually joined by **Molokoedov** for a romantic duet. **Tarasov**'s percussion solo is equally inventive, particularly in its delicate use of cymbals and gongs. **Ganelin**'s, on the

other hand, is disappointing. His experimental piece for two electronic keyboards is rather pedestrian and parts of it sound like the soundtrack to a plodding Sci-fi movie. Together as the Ganelin Trio they are marvellous, unpredictable and remarkably adept at handling sudden and complex changes in rhythm, tempo and idiom. In a matter of seconds you can expect swings from elegant chamber jazz to the most violent free furore. The Ganelin Trio inspired a

generation of innovative Russian musicians many of whom are featured here in DOCUMENT. When they split in 1987 after nearly 20 years together, due to Ganelin's emmigration to Israel, in Alexander Kahn's words, it "meant the end of a great band and the end of an era in Soviet jazz." R DOCUMENT costs £60.00 (postage free) and is available from Leo Records, 7 Clare Court, Judd Street, London WC1H 9QW.

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# Videophile



# Soviet Cinema

## *the old and the new*

Alexander Dovzhenko Sergo Paradianov Larisa Shepitko Andrei Tarkovsky

text: **Chris Blackford**

This issue, *Videophile* is devoted entirely to Soviet cinema and reviews a selection from the slowly growing number of films available on video. By way of an introduction to the films, some comments about the general climate in which they were made might prove useful.

"Of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important," Lenin said in 1922. He was quick to see the medium as an important tool for 'education'. Ever since, Soviet cinema and politics have been inextricably bound. By 1923 the Soviet government had nationalised film production, creating a monopoly over the medium, and by 1927 income generated by Soviet features and documentaries had surpassed that brought in from foreign films screened in the country. Although the subject matter of Soviet films during this period was essentially tailored to meet the ideological dictates of the government, some directors still managed to carry out significant experiments in form, in particular, the innovative approach to editing generally known as *Soviet montage*. However, under Stalin's control of the country a policy of *Socialist Realism* was introduced in 1934 which effectively outlawed experimental approaches to form in favour of more widely accessible realist modes of representation.

This climate of government interference over the form and content of films persisted until the late 80s period of *glasnost* and *perestroika* brought in by Gorbachev. One of the first public signs that a change of attitude was taking place occurred when the director **Elem Klimov**, who had had many battles with the Soviet Ministry of Film (*Goskino*), was elected First Secretary of the Film Makers Union.

Klimov has pledged to bring back the

revolutionary spirit of Soviet cinema to the film industry. He also wants to stem the flow of inferior state funded films by making each studio financially responsible for the films it produces. Moreover, he would like to see the

## lifting the ban?

end of the process whereby every director, cameraman and actor, regardless of ability, has the right to make a film every three years. Most importantly, though, he has set up a committee to review all films that have been banned in the last 20 years.

To 'ban' a film in the Soviet Union could mean one of a few options for the authorities: the director and crew are paid but the film is never screened; the film is shown abroad but not in the Soviet Union; or a film is written off at a loss and the studio has to recoup its cost from its budget. Those involved in the making of the film would receive an official warning and be suspended. Apparently there

## the end of a tradition?

was a tradition that on the first day of shooting a Soviet film, a plate was broken by the director. The pieces were then passed around among the crew. At the end of filming the plate was put back together again. If the whole plate could be re-assembled, then the belief was that the film would reach the screen intact. Hopefully, the recently reclaimed 'freedoms' in the former Soviet Union will mean that this tradition is no longer observed.

**Arsenal (1929)**

Dir. Alexander Dovzhenko

Hendring Hen 2 206

90 mins

**Earth (1930)**

Dir. Alexander Dovzhenko

Hendring Hen 2 205

83 mins

Alexander Dovzhenko (1894-1956) is often regarded as the most poetic of the great Soviet film directors of the silent era. His contemporary, Sergei Eisenstein, saw **Arsenal** and wrote: "Dovzhenko can shoot you *in the face*. Both through the content that he puts in the firing line and through the form that he is free from."

If Eisenstein's work sometimes bears "the heavy weight of form" (his words), Dovzhenko's formal experiments somehow mesh with the action. **Arsenal**, his first major film, describes the devastating effects of World War I on Russia. The poverty and hunger, the grief over millions of lives lost. The arsenal workers of Kiev (the film's Bolshevik heroes) strike, but are crushed by soldiers still loyal to the Czar. Static, dejected figures haunt lifeless streets; an impoverished farmer beats his horse in a vast wheat field; a desperate mother beats the child that screams for food; a soldier high on laughing gas, 'laughs' grotesquely, ironically foregrounded against battleground carnage. Dovzhenko's film captures the beauty of the natural landscape and places within it the misery of ordinary lives. The partisan propaganda of the industrial sequences never outweighs the poignancy of so many images. The director takes formal liberties with outrageous Dutch angles, or crosscutting for symbolic effect.

**For Earth**, frequently considered to be Dovzhenko's masterpiece, the importance of the natural landscape is further emphasized. Here, the wheat fields of his native Ukraine provide the setting for this account of the beginnings of the collectivisation of agriculture in the Soviet Union.

A tractor is acquired by a group of peasants in a rural village, heralding the mechanisation of crop production and distribution. A local peasant landowner (a kulak) murders Vassil, the tractor driver, because he has begun to appropriate the land by ploughing up the boundary fences. (In the course of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, 1928-32, in the region of three million kulaks were exterminated.) The film's spectacular climax involves extensive crosscutting between no fewer than six narrative lines: the assembled villagers at Vassil's funeral hear a government representative condemn all kulaks; the local kulak runs frantically through a graveyard; the hysterical grief of Vassil's betrothed; a priest prays for the punishment of unbelievers; a woman gives birth; wild horses stampede across the fields. The symbolism of each resounds within the others and most are set against a huge, portentous sky. Fruit-laden boughs are drenched in rain. Dovzhenko's representation of nature is arresting but never sentimentalised; its immensity is heightened by low-angle shots, its fecundity savoured in lingering close-ups. For all its aspirations and 'achievements', humankind is never greater than nature. These two films, rich in formal innovation, serve to remind us of this.

**The Colour of Pomegranates (1969)**

Dir. Sergo Paradjanov

73 mins

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**Legend of the Suram Fortress (1984)**

Dirs. Sergo Paradjanov, Dodo Abashidze

87 mins

Connoisseur Video CR 021

Sergo Paradjanov was born in Georgia in 1924 of Armenian parents. Although only a few of his films have reached the West these have been sufficient to establish him as one of the most original film-makers to emerge from the USSR since the 1950s. His career, however, has been mercilessly interfered with by the Soviet authorities, culminating in 1973 with a sentence of six years hard labour for various 'crimes' including homosexuality and speculating in art objects. Released in 1978, he was re-arrested in 1982 but acquitted after an international protest campaign.

**The Colour of Pomegranates** is based on the life and poetic imagery of the 18th century Armenian poet Sayat Nova. This is no ordinary dramatised biography, however. Divided into eight "chapters", the film consists of moving tableaux-like scenes which depict the poet's childhood passion for literature and music, his entry into the monastic life and eventual death. Paradjanov's curious, restricted approach to film language (static camera, no dissolves or fades to link scenes, and the bizarre use of jump-cuts to add and subtract actors/animals/objects from a given scene) juxtaposed with an eye for sumptuous colour and texture, make this a truly unique cinematic experience.

Special emphasis is given to ritualised gestures and a meticulous, painterly arrangement of symbolic objects and animals. Fore/middle/background activity often occurs simultaneously without priority, creating an

unusual tension between the static, frontal camera position and the disciplined, sometimes abundant activity within the frame. Shot-sequence editing simply doesn't apply. The overall effect is like watching strangely edited theatre.

**Legend of the Suram Fortress** is dedicated to "Georgian warriors of all times who have died for their country." The film follows a sort of tales-within-tales structure, though is essentially concerned with the rebuilding of the Suram Fortress which can only be achieved if a golden-haired, male youth is immured within its walls. The burial is the climax to the film.

Of course, this is the stuff of which Georgian myths are made and Paradjanov and Abashidze use the narratives as a symbolic means to assert Georgian cultural identity in the face of Soviet repression. Themes of exile, loss of native tongue, faith and tradition are the film's lifeblood. Georgia is likened to Amiran (Prometheus): "When Amiran breaks his chains Georgia will be free," a character gloomily predicts. Again there is virtually no camera movement, similar bizarre jump-cuts, but since the film is shot mainly on location, the golden and reddish browns of the Georgian countryside play a starring role in this remarkable piece of cinema.

**Ascent (1976)**

Dir. Larisa Shepitko

with Boris Plotnikov, Vladimir Gostyukhin

Connoisseur Video CR 070

105 mins

Questions of conscience are at the heart of Larisa Shepitko's (1939-79) **The Ascent**, arising when two Soviet partisans are taken

prisoner by the German soldiers occupying the Belorussia region of the USSR in 1942. Sotnikov (Boris Plotnikov), a Red Army commander, is interrogated by Portnov a Soviet turned Nazi collaborator who threatens him with death if he does not reveal military information. Sotnikov states that loyalty to one's ideals and comrades is more important than the will to survive. And so, he goes to a noble death, following a Christ-like road to the gallows with thinly veiled references to the Last Supper, Gethsemane and the Crucifixion. His comrade, Rybak (Vladimir Gostyukhin), chooses collaboration: a Judas who cannot commit suicide and faces the torment of becoming a traitor.

Besides Christian symbolism, the film is a powerful allegory for those who stay true to their ideals and face the consequences, and those who co-operate with the repressive measures of the Soviet government.

Shepitko's feel for landscape, the striking black and white photography of the unforgiving, snowy terrain, echoes the brilliance of her teacher Alexander Dovzhenko. **The Ascent** was her last completed film. Three years later she was killed in a car accident and world cinema was deprived of one of its major younger directors.

#### **Andrei Rublev (1966)**

Dir. Andrei Tarkovsky  
with Anatoly Solonitsyn  
Artificial Eye ART 011  
174 mins

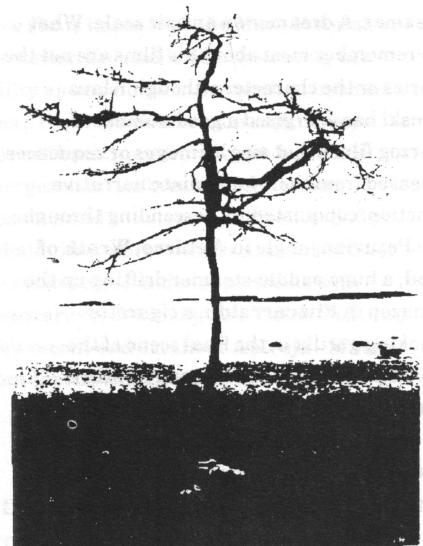
#### **The Sacrifice (1986)**

Dir. Andrei Tarkovsky  
with Erland Josephson, Susan Fleetwood  
Valerie Mairesse, Allan Edwall  
Artificial Eye ART 026  
142 mins

It's not uncommon to hear Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-86) described as one of the greatest film-makers of the century, and sometimes the greatest. Many critics also consider **Andrei Rublev** his finest work. A tempting claim in the light of the film's remarkable ambition. It truly is an epic achievement in a number of ways, not least its running time of nearly three hours.

Set in the 15th century it is concerned with eight imaginary episodes in the life of the Russian monk and icon painter Andrei Rublev, and the attention to period detail in all its majesty and squalor is outstanding. Set-design, costumes and make-up evoke the bleak atmosphere of this period of Russian history dogged by warring princes and invading Tartars. The raid on the city of Vladimir is the film's most memorable episode, charged with moments of tenderness and brutality. Leaving the security of the monastery to take up a painting commission, Rublev witnesses the scale of human suffering in a divided Russia, his journey becoming a personal awakening and test of faith. Anatoly Solonitsyn's gently affecting performance in the central role is ultimately the glue that holds this major project together.

**The Sacrifice** is another quest for the spiritual, set on the shores of the remote Swedish island of Gotland. "We have acquired a dreadful disharmony, an imbalance between our material and spiritual development," says Alexander (Erland Josephson), an actor turned lecturer. His family and a few friends have gathered to celebrate his birthday. A television broadcast informs them that nuclear warheads are about to be launched. In the powercut darkness he prays to God, promising to



sacrifice himself and his family if God will spare the world.

Traumatised faces are fixed in limbo lighting, as remote from each other as the island. Swedish shepherd calls and shakuhachi provide a distant, yet poignant soundtrack to a world poised on the brink of catastrophe. Tarkovsky's vision of humanity's darkest hours is chilling, but immensely absorbing. Erland Josephson's contribution to some strong ensemble acting and the evocative cinematography of Sven Nykvist, are two of a number of connections with the work of Ingmar Bergman. The near reverential pace, the mysterious dream-like symbolism and the poetry of those slow tracking shots, however, are hallmarks of Tarkovsky's unique approach to cinematic form. He died from cancer within a year of the film's completion. **The Sacrifice**, therefore, marks the end of a magnificent career and ranks among the highest achievements of world cinema. R

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Improvisation - Its Nature and Practice in Music

Derek Bailey  
The British Library National Sound Archive  
£12.95

*"In 1968 I ran into Steve Lacy on the street in Rome. I took out my pocket tape recorder and asked him to describe in fifteen seconds the difference between composition and improvisation. He answered: In fifteen seconds the difference between composition and improvisation is that in composition you have all the time you want to decide what to say in fifteen seconds, while in improvisation you have fifteen seconds.' His answer lasted exactly fifteen seconds."* (Frederic Rzewski)

The only way a decent book on improvisation could be written is by using first hand accounts with leading practitioners. And this is exactly what Derek Bailey has done.

This is a very readable book divided into short, distinct chapters and filled with fascinating insights and anecdotes, shedding light with apparent ease on slippery, tricky subject matter.

Aspects covered include: "free" improvisation; improvisation within different idioms (Indian music, flamenco, baroque, organ music, rock and jazz); relationship with audience; teaching; improvisation in relation

to and within composition; solo playing; objections; recording; and groups which have endured over long periods (Alterations, AMM, Han Bennink / Misha Mengelberg).

The book is also a useful record of Derek Bailey's involvement: from his work as a 'professional' in dance halls, night clubs and studios, to his work with Joseph Holbrooke (1963-66) chipping away at the old structures until a completely free situation emerged; developing a language through solo playing ("a language that would be literally disjointed, whose constituents would be unconnected in any casual or grammatical way and so would be open to manipulation"); and as the organiser of the annual Company Week (1976-present) where a pool of musicians, largely unfamiliar with each other come together in ad hoc groupings in the belief that "the shifting process itself provide(s) the perfect foundation for this kind of music."

Derek now recognises that improvisation is "prevalent and irrepressible" and that any discussion regarding its future popularity or possible extinction is futile. "Rather like presuming that the course of the sun is affected by the popularity of sun-bathing." Improvisation is a musical life-force. (Improvisation is available from Incus Records, 14 Downs Road, London E5 8DS) **Phil England**

### Of Walking In Ice

Werner Herzog  
Jonathan Cape £4.99

Many critics and film-goers still watch films by Werner Herzog expecting to find coherent narratives and detailed characterisation. Forget it. Herzog is first and foremost a

dreamer. A dreamer on an epic scale. What we remember most about his films are not the stories or the characters (though Klaus Kinski has energised a good number of Herzog films), but single images or sequences released from their immediate narrative function: conquistadors descending through the Peruvian jungle in *Aguirre, Wrath of God*; a huge paddle-steamer drifting up the Amazon in *Fitzcarraldo*; a cigarette-smoking gorilla in the final scene of the documentary *Echoes From a Sombre Empire*. Herzog is a master of dreaming up images of grandeur, of pathos, of tragedy, of madness, of obsession; images that touch us with their puzzling, ambiguous poetry.

*Of Walking In Ice* is classic Herzogian terrain. At the end of November 1974 he was informed that his friend, the film-maker Lotte Eisner, was dying in Paris. Believing that she would stay alive if he travelled on foot, he set out from Munich to Paris, a journey that took him three weeks to complete. This short book is his notebook account of that journey with a few "private remarks" omitted. Though not originally intended for "unfamiliar eyes" it was first published in Germany in 1978 and in Britain in 1991. And, it's all here: Herzog the solitary outsider, the obsessive idealist, the visionary. Bags of self-indulgent bombast tempered by humility. Werner Herzog becomes the Klaus Kinski of his own movie-camera imagination.

This is no mere travelogue and how could it be with Herzog for narrator. His journey through the atrocious winter rain and snow becomes an epic voyage of self-affirmation, a pilgrimage, though *in reality* nothing of any major consequence happens. He is regularly soaked to the skin; his Achilles tendon swells to twice its normal size; he sleeps rough in

barns and scrounges the odd meal. But in Herzog the dreamer's mind, simple events become sublime ("I saw birds rising from an empty field, increasing ever more until the sky was filled with them, and I saw that they were coming from the womb of the earth, from very deep down, where gravity is."), simple folk become strange ("I saw an old woman, small, bow-legged, madness etched across her face; she pushed a bicycle, delivering the Sunday papers. She stalked the houses as if they were The Enemy.")

This is an enjoyably idiosyncratic performance. The logical next step would be for a great idiosyncratic director to put it on the screen.

**Chris Blackford**

#### **The Pink Violin**

Jon Rose

NMA Publications £8.00

Not a lot of people know this but John Cage got the idea for his (in)famous 4'33" from a 1941 composition entitled **4 Kilometres; 33 Metres** by the pathbreaking Australian composer, musicologist and violinist Dr. Johannes Rosenberg, who also gave violin lessons to the Beatles, who in turn used a segment of his **9th Violin Concerto** on their **White Album**, calling it 'Number 9'. Rosenberg's staggeringly innovative work is presented in his highly elaborate **Unified Music Relativity Theory**. And he still holds the world record for Violin Throwing.

Jon Rose's book seeks to uncover the intricacies of the neglected Rosenberg dynasty, including references to the jazz violinist Jo 'Doc' Rosenberg, and the country & western violinist Jimmi Rosenberg, who becomes an extreme performance artist.

decapitating violins. It is believed he committed suicide.

The memory and work of these somewhat chimerical Rosenbergs is brought to life in this anthology of newspaper and magazine articles, computer programs, blindfold test, transcripts of a video interview and talk show, lecture notes and a traveller's handbook entitled 'Swedish for Violin Players'. These accounts are substantiated by a plethora of photographic, diagrammatic and music score material. In due course, issues such as music theft, inflated experimental music theories, "Yuppy Jazz", ethnomusicological studies, the invasion of advertising hype and the transglobal corporatism of Madonna and Michael Jackson are interrogated and large quantities of urine extracted. "The Age of Shopping ensures that it is also the Age of Mediocrity." The Rosenbergs were a lot of things but mediocre was not one of them.

**The Pink Violin** is brim-full of ideas and resplendent in various typographical guises. In some respects it's the literary counterpart of Woody Allen's *Zelig* - a *tour de force* of artifice and absurdity, but with a sharper satirical edge. **R**

**(The Pink Violin is available from ReR Megacorp, 46 The Gallop, Sutton, Surrey SM2 5RY, England / Tel: 081-770 2141)**

**Chris Blackford**



# anything goes

text: **Chris Blackford**

images: Alfred 23 Harth

*"Culture has become like a part of nature, as out of control as any rampaging flood, forest fire, or hurricane."* (Thomas McEvilly, **Artforum**)

*"Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture... knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion which reigns in the 'taste' of the patrons. Artists, gallery owners, critics, and public wallow together in the 'anything goes', and the epoch is one of slackening."* (Jean-Francois Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition**)

**German-born** musician/composer/artist, Alfred 23 Harth (b. 28.9.49), makes a living out of making sense of chaos, organising diversity, controlling adversity. For over two decades his finger has been on the pulse of experimental music, and his music has often set that pulse racing, too. He has not been content to merely throw out juxtapositions or glue them together into some kind of crazy paving: Harth, and the groups he has been involved in, have sought coherence through continuity, have attempted to channel the rampaging flood into a seamless flow where challenging, new form is sometimes created from the familiar. He enjoys mixing styles...

"I'm not happy with the word *mixing*," he says. "Mixing is something I do in my kitchen. I make a good Frankfurt sauce, but I don't cook in my music."

We'll start with current projects, then. He's writing a ballet in Frankfurt. Four dancers and four musicians. Mostly they improvise within structures he's worked out beforehand. He's also been touring the California area this summer in a duo called *Parcours Bleu A Deux* with tenor saxophonist

Heinz Sauer. They've had the duo for two years.

"Our concert programme is about the antithesis of cultural order and disorder, the rhythm between chaos and cosmos. It's also about the ancient conflict between Cain and Abel. Cain, of course, is known as the first creator of the urban situation, the archetypal city, and he built this city on the bones of Abel. This is what the Bible story tells us.

## CHAOS AND COSMOS

"We also have a female voice speaking the text of the Apocalypse, Chapter 16, which is fitting since it mirrors the situation all over the world. Musically speaking in the duo, we play several saxophones and bass clarinet, and use backing tapes from two DAT recorders. Each of these has two tracks. These feature computer improvisations we have done in the studio prior to the live performances. The female voice is also on one of the tracks. We can control the tapes from pedals, so we can fade in and fade out the various tracks according to our feelings at the time. This is an attempt to play live with backing tapes but not to be slaves to the rhythms of these tapes."

So what sort of musical background does he come from. Is this another case of an avant-garde musician rebelling against an academic musical education?

"I had a musical education that was not very conventional. I did not go to any music school or academy. From that point of view I'm a so-called autodidact. I had lessons from a teacher who was a very versatile musician. He had played cello in cinemas at the time of silent films, and he had travelled on ocean steamers playing dance music on tenor

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saxophone. He went all over the world doing this. So, I started clarinet lessons with this man at the age of 12. I had bought this clarinet with the money I got from selling my toy electric train.

"When I was 15 I started on tenor saxophone and I had some lessons from two local jazz musicians in mainstream improvisation. After that I received no further musical education. So, I had no music school education to rebel against.

## A SENSE OF HISTORY

"By the age of 13 or 14 I was forming my own bands, starting off with old-time jazz and at the same time I was developing a sense of the history of jazz. My next band played swing, and then after that I played so-called modern jazz. When I was 17 I had a little jazz club in Frankfurt, and a group of friends came in with records by Albert Ayler and Jimmy Giuffre and these were my sort of initiation into more sophisticated and experimental or avant-garde musics.

"I started a new band which was called Just Music (1967) and this was influenced by these records. It was a free improvising band with many string players in it. A bass, two cellos, violin, a guitar player, trombone, drums and myself. We played intensively in a free way and I think it was one of the first free bands to use so many string players. The band was recorded in 1969 on ECM. Actually it was the second record that the ECM label recorded and it was my first recording."

In the early 70s, Harth worked principally in a free jazz vein, and then around 1975 he formed what was, arguably, to become his most successful musical partnership: the Goebbels / Harth Duo. In the German

multi-instrumentalist, Heiner Goebbels, he found a kindred spirit as eager as he to develop a highly eclectic music composed of many strands usually kept apart by snobbery and distrust. The songs of Hanns Eisler were an early touchstone for this enterprising collaboration.

## HANNS AND HEINER . . .

"In 1975, Heiner and myself started to look for some other music that would encourage us to play more creatively. The sort of music that was not being played much by other musicians. We had been together for a short time in a rock-jazz band, which is where we met. After that band broke up we set up the Goebbels / Harth Duo. Heiner had been to music school and had known about Hanns Eisler and his music, so he started off by looking at the melodies and eventually we decided that the songs were right for us. The songs were written for the piano mainly and I took over the part of the singer on my tenor saxophone. Also, we had set up the Sogenanntes Linksradikales Blasorchester, so we were sort of pioneers of German Left-wing political avant-garde music in the 70s. And, of course, Hanns Eisler's music fitted in with that cultural scene.

**"Hommage / Vier Fauste Hanns Eisler** (1976) was not exactly dogmatic but more strict to the themes of Eisler and we were young and more energetic at this time in the way we were playing - very fast and not laid back. **Vom Sprengen Des Gartens** (1978) had a wider range in themes, if you think of the Rameau and Bach pieces we played. We were trying to widen our composer sympathies away from just Eisler, and this record was more poetic, concerned with

poetry, than the previous one. Then we had an invitation to make the **Zeit Wird Knapp** (1981) album which used texts by Bertold Brecht, mostly unknown love poems. We chose this material because we wanted to avoid repeating ourselves. We asked Dagmar Krause to interpret the texts.

### ... POETRY, PUNK & PEKING

"This was opening us up to other musical influences. We were becoming influenced by punk and new wave, and **Indianer Fur Morgen** (1981) was our sort of answer to these developments. Also, it was more or less the beginning of Heiner's career as a synthesizer player. I had been pushing him into that area because I was looking for more scope from keyboards. I encouraged him to buy this cheap Wasp synthesizer and at first he refused, but then he finally took it and later bought a more expensive Korg which you can hear on **Indianer Fur Morgen**. For the **Frankfurt - Peking** (1984) album we incorporated parts from the Peking Opera and developed the visual aspects of our music in the live concerts, particularly in the performance of the Peking Opera piece. The last record we did together was **Live In Victoriaville** (1988) our only live Duo recording. It gives a kind of overview of the various albums and puts it all together, after many years of performing these pieces, in a more mature way."

**Indianer Fur Morgen** and **Frankfurt - Peking** are probably the high points of the Duo's achievements. In less adroit hands this multi-faceted input would quickly have become an unwieldy edifice groaning under the weight of its inflated ambition. Instead, what shines out from these recordings is

the clarity of their organisation and execution. They possess a directness and concision (perhaps from new wave), marshalled at times by a strict electronic pulse (perhaps the legacy of Kraftwerk) and intensified by free saxophony. There is room, also, for melody, though it is often fragmented by the Duo's cunning use of space. Like the finest eclectic work, the whole is always much more than the sum of its parts.

Outside the Duo, Harth was no less ambitious during the 80s and he was involved in some of the decade's most advanced pluralistically-minded groupings such as Cassiber, Cassix (an amalgam of Cassiber and Stormy Six), Duck & Cover, Gestalt et Jive, Oh Moscow and Vladimir Estragon. In Cassiber (Harth, Goebbels, Christoph Anders, Chris Cutler) the diverse influences had become so seamlessly interwoven, the genre divisions so comfortably transcended, that it was virtually impossible to describe the group's improvisations in anything but the most general, and usually inadequate, terms like 'experimental rock' or 'improvised song'.

### A STATE OF FLUX

Harth left Cassiber after their second album and formed the equally eclectic Gestalt et Jive. **Nouvelle Cuisine** (1985) brought together Harth, Steve Beresford, Ferdinand Richard, Uwe Schmitt and Anton Fier. Their approach to improvisation permitted idiomatic and abstract playing simultaneously within a given piece. Hence the drummer and bass player could set up a rock-derived rhythmic pattern, whilst the saxophonist leapt into the abstract and the



keyboard player dropped in jazz-related fragments. The ground was shifting all the time, effortlessly, rapidly, even in the slower pieces. Some sort of disciplined awareness of structure held everything together, kept the state of flux within suggested, rather than stated, parameters.

**Plan Eden** (1987) showcased Harth's virtuosic sax and clarinet playing in a collection of abstract and atmospheric miniature solos and in duo with Lindsay Cooper and John Zorn; with Cooper he achieved a restrained lyricism, with Zorn an unrestrained, exhilarating ferocity one moment, the next, a milder, more measured temperament. Those wishing to further investigate Harth's performance in saxophone duo should inspect his album with Peter Brotzmann. **Go-No-Go** (1987) brought out the best from these two distinctive improvisors, exploring a range of moods and extended techniques at the highest level.

## ANYTHING GOES

Most interesting in terms of the philosophical issues it deals with is **Anything Goes** (1986), where Harth used compositions by three composers (Heiner Goebbels' 'Die Befreiung des Prometheus', John Oswald's 'Mystery Tapes Eg' and John Zorn's 'Godard') to arrive at two sidelong compositions entitled 'Beethoven, anything goes' and 'Eris'.

"When I had the idea of using compositions by three composers I was thinking about one of the characteristics of postmodern arts, that is the realisation that everything has been splintered or fragmented and there is no innovation possible in the sense of modern art where it had always been possible to be avant-garde, to transcend new borders. In

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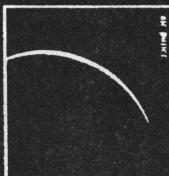
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the 80s it seemed as if it was no longer possible to seek and desire to transcend new borders. All areas of cultural affairs seemed to have been developed and were well known. So, what remains is to look at the table and put all the pieces back together in a new order by the techniques of combination. The order of combinations is what counts. So, this is the sort of statement I wanted to make with **Anything Goes**."

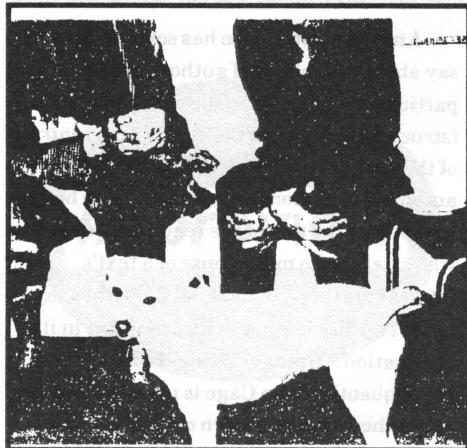
## VAMPIRES

In fact, this album cuts across a number of issues related to the postmodernism debate. For example, the album displays the postmodern appetite for *intertextuality*, the manner in which a work's form becomes a matter of incorporating quotes from (perhaps in the form of pastiche or parody) other works, or as Harth suggests, trying out new combinations of existing materials or idioms. Therefore, **Anything Goes** starts with finished works and sets out to produce something else from the manner in which these interrelate. This is an extreme form of sampling, where sampling becomes the composition itself, rather than used in conjunction with the 'composer's' own 'original' material. The process, of course, stands in opposition to modernism (Harth uses the term "modern art") in its strictest sense of seeking *new form* as a break from, and challenge to, traditional idioms and means of expression. In this respect, the album takes eclecticism to its logical and perhaps absurd conclusion in revealing its essentially vampiric nature. Any notion of 'new form' or 'progress' within eclecticism can only be understood in the way existing forms interrelate.

**Anything Goes** also has something to say about the subject of authorship, in particular in relation to the postmodern (structuralist) idea of the 'death' or *decentring* of the author in the text; the view that authorial intentions or messages have been usurped by the role of the reader (listener) who attempts to make sense of a text's intertextual play, or as Roland Barthes says: "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." (*Image-Music-Text*) Consequently, John Cage is usually cited as one of the key postmodern composers since his use of chance and indeterminacy seeks to rid the 'composition' of its author, of intention.

## THE END OF ECLECTICISM

Whilst Harth's **Anything Goes** does not seek to get rid of intention, it does, however, problematize the nature of its authorship. Harth claims a composition credit in the sleeve note along with Goebbels, Oswald and Zorn, yet his role as 'composer' is of a more secondary nature than theirs. Strictly speaking they are the composers of the music, they provide the materials, Harth's role is one of recombination: he manipulates, re-orders, re-composes the materials, so to speak. His presence is sensed not in the materials themselves, but in the manner of their juxtaposition, intersection and so on. This process of *bricolage* is common enough in postmodern works, where an existing style or object is appropriated and then relocated in another context which bestows upon it a new set of meanings. However, the difference between **Anything Goes** and a good deal of postmodern works where *bricolage* is used, is that they use the technique for reasons of



security, to serve up the familiar in a way that invites nostalgia (hence Lyotard's charge of a "slackening" in relation to eclectic works), whereas Harth has selected formally challenging works as raw material in the first place (Zorn's 'Godard' also involves acts of *bricolage* - therefore *bricolage* within *bricolage*?) and from these he has produced two compositions which are in themselves challenging in their use of dense, multi-layered, somewhat phantasmagoric, structure. In fact, **Anything Goes** not only uses *bricolage*, it is a statement about the use of *bricolage* itself and eclectic works in general. This is implied in the atmosphere and tone of the music which tends towards the turbid, the sense that a state of bloated stagnation has been arrived at. There are times when the music barely moves, is struggling to wade through the muddy layers of its excessive appropriation. This is the endgame of eclecticism.

Formed in the late 80s, Vladimir Estragon demonstrated again that if handled with discipline and sensitivity, an eclectic input could show the way forward. To date, it's the

most unusual line-up that Harth has brought together: Ulrike Haage, a pop keyboards player, FM Einheit, a percussionist with the industrial/noise group Einsturzende Neubaten, and free vocalist (amongst other things) Phil Minton. **Three Quarks For Muster Mark** (1989) predominantly features compositions by Harth and Haage, though enough room is allocated to Minton to stretch the form with his remarkable vocal contortions. The ghost of Hanns Eisler is present, too, among the tightly-knit allusions to free jazz, rock and pop. Samples used, are used sparingly and serve to present another level of continuity rather than their common use as agents of fragmentation.

## DIE ZERSPLITTERUNG

About the same time Harth compiled **Die Zersplitterung**, a collection of essays and poetry, accompanied by his paintings, collages and drawings spanning 1967-88. This was later issued with a 7" 45 consisting of two new solo compositions featuring texts by the celebrated Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore and Jürgen Ploog. The Tagore piece, **Du bist die Abendwolke** (1989), is really rather magical; whispered voice-over, breathy sax and discreet, ethereal electronics, pushed along by a percussive pop rhythm track. **Vol De Nuit** (1990) is part electro-acoustic, including birdsong, and more unsettled in mood, Harth's tenor becoming quite strident against a backdrop of electronic discharges.

If the 'author' of **Anything Goes** had become decentred, just one of many points of reference reflecting off the surface of one another, the autobiographical had returned as one of the key threads running through

the rich fabric of Harth's most recent work *Sweet Paris* (1991).

"To explain the general aims of *Sweet Paris* is, at the moment, not so easy for me because this work is still very fresh. I always need a kind of distance from my own works to talk about them in a more reflective and analytical way. But I can say that about two to three years ago Paris meant to me a kind of point of flight, a point of desire, of artistic freedom, a place of inspiration.

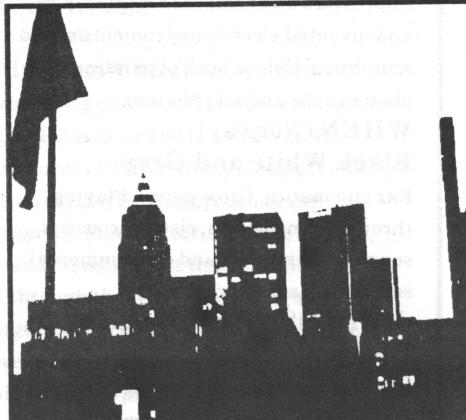
## A WALK THROUGH A23H

"I was searching for a place that would represent the artist's soul and I discovered that the city of Paris is a kind of island which fits in with this idea of the artist's soul. Every time I return to Paris I feel very satisfied. I get such a lot from this city. If you want to call *Sweet Paris* a concept in the way that I use the city as a framework for my own artistic expression, then it's a kind of love letter to Paris, an *homage*. The city became an object of love, it put me in a higher state of mind when I was having problems in my own life. So, it's a very personal album. After I finished the CD it suddenly occurred to me how this work gives an overview of the 25 years I've been a musician."

*Sweet Paris* is arguably Harth's most ambitious work to date since it clearly involves all his skills as an organiser of diverse materials. It's a difficult work to describe, even more difficult to categorise. It's so many genres, so many discourses (travelogue, documentary, curriculum vitae, music-theatre, poetry, political polemic and, of course, the usual cross-fertilisation of musical genres) that it somehow ends up being more than the sum of its parts,

cohering within a general framework that is the city of Paris.

The work 'unfolds' episodically for 66½ minutes, divided into sections or scenes which are sometimes interlinked or superimposed upon one another by the sounds of the city - the metro, cafe life, street conversations, the sound of footsteps and so on. And sometimes these sections/scenes consist of previously unreleased recordings of Harth's various groups over the decades:



Gestalt et Jive, La Guardia, or collaborations with the likes of Paul Lovens, Christoph Anders, Nicole van den Plas, Peter Kowald and an interesting recording from 1965 of Harth playing clarinet in a trad jazz outfit, aged 16. There are also electro-acoustic passages and material that resembles film music. Harth makes regular use of a sort of depth of field technique, sometimes choosing to foreground the spoken texts (in German and English) over the music and other times pushing the voices to the periphery and allowing the music to dominate the frame. Consequently it's another challenging work which places many demands on the listener whose task it often is to decide which level

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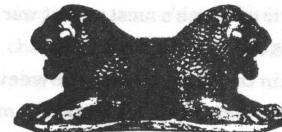
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of address to focus on at any one time. Therefore, the work not only bears repeated listening, it requires it. Although much of the 'personal history' and references inscribed in the work by Harth are no doubt private enough not be discovered, one nevertheless gains a pretty clear picture of the sort of musician/composer Harth has developed from and into over two and a half decades. Above all it's the manner in which Harth seems to relish making sense and coherence of seemingly unrelated materials that impresses most. He is undoubtedly one of the most advanced highly eclectic composers working today.

## 23

At some point in the mid-80s he ceased being plain Alfred Harth and instead assumed the rather mysterious *nom de plume* Alfred 23 Harth. It seemed like a rude question to be asking, an invasion of someone's privacy, but I knew the interview wouldn't be complete without knowing *why*. I sensed his unease at the question, but it was asked nevertheless. What is the meaning of the '23'?

"There is one meaning in the I-Ching, if you look up the 23rd hexagram. It's about the splintering, the falling apart. I quite like this explanation of the 23 because it very much fits in with these fragmented postmodern times. And it also has a kind of numerological hidden, maybe magical, meaning. Alban Berg had been a big fan of this number, too, and he used it in several of his works. But, after 23 comes 24 and you could ask me, 'What is the meaning of the 24?' But 24 is not part of my artistic name, so why should you ask me about the 24. I

respect this sort of question which has come up, but..." R

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

An \* placed before a recording denotes that it is known to be currently out of print.

However, Autumn 1992 sees the re-issue of the Riskant Goebbels/Harth Duo material on one CD almost in its entirety; now released on eva/Tokyo.

- \* **Just Music** (1969) ECM 1002
- Hommage/Vier Fauste** Hanns Eisler (1976) FMP/SAJ 08
- "Hort, Hort" - Sogenanntes Linksradikales Blasorchester** (1977) Trikont US 36
- Vom Sprengen Des Gartens** (1978) FMP/SAJ 20
- \* **Indianer Fur Morgen** (1981) Riskant 40001
- \* **Zeit Wird Knapp** (1981) Riskant 4014
- Das Saxophonorchester Frankfurt** (1982) FMP/SAJ 40
- Man or Monkey** (Cassiber) (1982) Riskant 4005
- \* **This Earth!** (1983) ECM 1264
- The Beauty And The Beast** (Cassiber) (1984) Re 0110
- \* **Frankfurt - Peking** (1984) Riskant 4011
- Nouvelle Cuisine** (1985) Moers Music 02038
- Anything Goes** (1986) Creative Works 1005
- \* **Gestalt et Jive** (1987) Creative Works 1006/1007
- Go-No-Go** (1987) FMP 1150
- Plan Eden** (1987) Creative Works 1008
- Live In Victoriaville** (1988) Victo 4
- Three Quarks For Muster Mark** (1989) Tiptoe CD 888 803
- † **Die Zersplitterung** (incl 7" 45) (1989/90)
- † **Sweet Paris** (1991) fmf 0291
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## Primecuts

**Text: Chris Blackford**

**First**, a correction. In the last *Prime cuts* I mistakenly reviewed Incus Records' CD 09 as "Village Voice" when the title should have been **Village Life**. Apologies for any confusion caused. (CB)

**John Butcher**

13 Friendly Numbers

Acta Records

Acta 6 CD

This somewhat Greenawayesque titled CD is arguably the most impressive showcase to date for the prodigious talent of British saxophonist John Butcher. These 13 improvisations, featuring tenor and soprano instruments in solo and multitrack contexts, reveal the breadth and depth of his inquisitive temperament. Looked at from a formal perspective they represent a series of possible solutions to various technical challenges. Butcher's sleeve notes outline an interest in approaches to "multiphonic patterns", space, rhythm and colour etc.

It's easy to become preoccupied by

technical concerns, however, and it's taken me a number of close hearings to focus properly on the expressive subtleties of this music. 'Notelet', for example, is a delightful miniature displaying an appealing lightness of touch and lyricism, whilst the multitracked 'Mackle Music' (including baritone) demonstrates the curious, bubbling, percussive qualities of the instruments when amplified.

This CD puts John Butcher at the forefront of non-idiomatic saxophony with fellow Briton Evan Parker.

**Edward Vesala / Sound & Fury**

Invisible Storm

ECM Records

1461 CD LP

A truly bizarre opening vocal ('Sheets and Shrouds') gives way to the dignified timbre of Marko Ylonen's cello which in turn is followed by the polyrhythmic hurly-burly of 'Gordian's Flashes'. Blazing brass, thumping percussion, bursts of fruit-machine electronics - and that's not even the first 10 minutes!

Yes, this is an album of contrasts and mood swings. Finnish-born percussionist Edward Vesala happily bites off more than many composers comfortably chew. His compositions (all very much of a piece) and arrangements for the 10-piece Sound & Fury are detailed but not fussy; the writing for brass and woodwind is especially rich and intricate without being overwrought, possessing the muscular assurance of Mingus' finest.

It's jazz, bluesy, contemporary chamber, echoes of the Caribbean, even some wonderful lopsided organ ('Sarastus') reminiscent of

Allen Ravenstine's on Pere Ubu's **The Art of Walking**. It's long (just over the hour) yet without the *longueurs*. Best heard in one uninterrupted session. Magnificent.

**B Shops For The Poor & Peter**

**Brotzmann**

**Visions & Blueprints**

**No Wave**

**NW CD 2**

The tendency, to date, has been to gather up a handful of names and throw them in the face of **B Shops For The Poor**. World Saxophone Quartet, Henry Cow, Sun Ra, Ornette's Prime Time are among the usual projectiles. Actually, **B Shops** have a sound that's their's and nobody else's. **The Iceberg Principle** effectively demonstrated it's tight, often caustic, built around the driving complexities of four saxes.

**Visions & Blueprints** ploughs similar terrain but the blade cuts deeper with improv colossus Peter Brotzmann putting his formidable weight behind each of the 17 tracks. His sax on 'Weimar Years' is positively barbarous, pitted against a quickening military tempo produced by the other saxes. There's a heavier rhythmic presence on most pieces, throbbing drum machines, sporadic searing guitar, which makes for a tense and almost airless atmosphere. Solos squeeze out from a finer mesh. Fiercely compelling.

**Mehead**

**One Good Eye**

**Makerite Records**

**Make Two CD**

**Mehead** are another group in danger of

drowning in the welter of comparisons stirred up by lazy critics. Surreal, sometimes 'wacky' humorists, they are part of a British tradition as old as Syd Barrett and Kevin Ayers, and you'll probably need to be in this sort of mood to get the most from **One Good Eye**.

The CD is only their second recording in eight years, preceded by the acclaimed **Brain Collages** EP of 1988. 12 tightly-structured tracks played with barely a pause and linked by some fascinating tape and loop outros/intros, reveal a group as rhythmically unpredictable and entertaining as Hatfield and the North were in their day, though more inclined towards experimental rock and occasionally indie-pop. 'With Scissors' flirts with total disintegration, 'Backwards Man' has flashes of the carnivalesque, and David Maleed's adventurous guitar is a catalyst for all manner of formal transformations.

Discover who they *really* are.

**Hession / Wilkinson / Fell**

**foom! foom!**

**Bruce's Fingers**

**BF5 CD**

With their previous live release, **Bogey's**, having received such critical acclaim, an atmosphere of expectation inevitably greets **foom! foom!**. And happily you will not be disappointed by the first studio recording of this strong improvising trio. The six pieces move easily back and forth between free jazz and the non-idiomatic. The musicians have a wonderful understanding of each other's temperaments and once locked on to a mood, refinements and developments are explored with great subtlety. 'Ballad of Otis Twelvepersons' is a fine example of how to pace and structure an improvisation,

building from an incoherent slumber through a host of fragmentary digressions to a short-lived crescendo of biting intensity. 'Snog With My Drums' is their brief and nicely timed piece of rib-tickling ribaldry. Alan Wilkinson's reeds are the big-hearted, expressive core of their activity, Paul Hession's bustling drums coax and shape direction, and bassist, Simon H. Fell, supplies an almost subliminal, yet buoyant undercurrent. An assured and impassioned performance throughout.

**Conspiracy**  
Intravenous  
Matchless Recordings  
MR21 CD

This is dark, disturbing music with an almost East European feel: something akin to navigating a pitch black basement lurking with hidden dangers. But it is also beautiful, with spine-tingling capacities. Despite the title of the first piece, 'Fear of a Vacuum', Conspiracy have a mastery of silence: everything can suddenly fall away, very quiet passages can take place, and individual players can drop out without a neurotic need to fill space. A refined group sense has developed. There are no overbearing characters, everything is a part of and subservient to a greater whole. The work takes place in a nether world between the melodic and the timbral. Adam Bohman's prepared strings provide a wild card element but all the players push their instruments into non-melodic territory: Couldry inside the piano and with his electric keyboards; Hammond "mis-using" and "preparing" his guitar; Telfer with a variety of gutteral techniques. Suspend disbelief, put your

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**Quintet Moderne**

The Strange And The Commonplace

Po Torch Records

PTR / JWD 19 S (vinyl)

This is possibly the most unusual release of the year that I hope you will encounter. The 'S' in its code stands for 'Single', but you shouldn't be thinking in terms of something chartbound, mass produced and eminently disposable. Quite the opposite, in fact. Here is three minutes and 30 seconds of freely improvised music, featuring Paul Rutherford, Paul Lovens, Teppo Hauta-aho, Harri Sjostrom and Phil Wachsmann. It's rather bewitching and not without a hint of the Orient. Paul Lovens' sleeve note describes its unfolding, blow by bow, as it were. A beautiful and equally bewitching cover painting by Christine Lovens, too. Enough said.

Po Torch Records, P.O. Box 1005, D-5100 Aachen 1, Germany.

**Tony Bevan / Paul Rogers / Steve Noble**

Bigshots

Incus Records

CD08 CD

My word, these chaps were in a strange mood when these pieces were made. I've spent a number of months trying to get inside this music but there's something in the atmosphere here, a detached sort of austerity that mostly keeps you out. Steve Noble's percussion borders on the vindictive; there's a clinical edge to its sudden thuds and piercing chimes which always seem to catch you

# hession / wilkinson / fell

*live (recording)*

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Ben Watson

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unawares. Passion is reserved for occasional spirited bursts from Tony Bevan's tenor and soprano saxes and Paul Rogers' darkly melancholic *arco* bass (reminiscent of Schnittke), though he conjures up a curious folk-like jig on the miniature '4 A.M. Farewell'. The title-track is a masterpiece of suspense, tension and release, breaking in waves. It also displays the trio's superb management of sounds at or just over the threshold of audibility.

To anyone who thinks that free improvisation might have become just another closed orthodoxy, this peculiar and challenging album provides the appropriate response.

#### **The Dedication Orchestra**

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arrangements are Kenny Wheeler's tender setting of Pukwana's ballad 'B My Dear' and Keith Tippett's wonderfully breezy reading of Miller's 'Dancing Damon'. Money acquired from sales of **Spirits Rejoice** will go in a special trust fund dedicated to helping young black musicians in South Africa. Support an important project and savour a treasurable recording.

**David Shea**

Shock Corridor  
Avant  
Avan 013 CD

David Shea is a New York turntables and sampler specialist. **Shock Corridor** is a 1963 film by the American director Samuel Fuller and the thematic inspiration for the principal composition on this CD. The film is essentially about a journalist who feigns madness to get committed to an asylum in order to solve a murder. Gradually feigned madness becomes 'real madness' ...

This material provides Shea with ample opportunity to reveal the scope of his compelling *noir* fantasies. This and the work's apparent "sound blocks" approach to structure, invite comparisons with John Zorn's **Spillane**, in particular. Shea's genre leaps and shuffles are less pronounced, however, leaving recurring "didjeridu drone", "muted string pops" and "sexy vocals" to act as an adhesive for the many disparate elements in this complex work. The highly inventive 'Trio For Samplers' demonstrates that in disciplined hands the sampler is an important late 20th century instrument, and not merely a fashionable missed opportunity as most other work with this technology would seem to suggest. **R**

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